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MATERIAL ENTANGLEMENTS: GENDER, RITUAL, AND POLITICS AMONG THE BORADA OF SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT Women's status, knowledge, and artisan technologies among the Borada of southern Ethiopia have transformed significantly in the last 100 years. In their indigenous religion, many Borada artisans and farmers mediated change through rites of passage to achieve different statuses in society. Subsequently, an individual's (artisan and farmer) action fields and boundaries in the community and household were dependent on their status, including gender. Furthermore, many Borada believed that as they produced material culture such as iron works, ceramics, stone tools, houses, and food, that these objects also transitioned through rites of passage stages. Like a Borada human being, the stage/status of material culture was indicated by its location in the region, community, and household. This paper will review Borada indigenous perspectives concerning gender and material culture production and how their world view transformed with the introduction of global religions and with the impact of national politics through examining women's life histories.

Key Words: Gender; Religion; Material culture; Rites of passage.

INTRODUCTION

In her book *Reinventing Africa* (1997), Ifi Amadiume advocated reevaluating African women's knowledge and contributions to politics, social movements, and religion by examining history through an Afrocentric and gendered perspective. In recent decades, women have continued to offer that the Western perspective denies a gendered history perpetuating an ethnocentric and androcentric interpretation, a process that significantly serves to alienate indigenous peoples identity and history (Deloria, 1988; 1998; Behar, 1995; Langton, 1996; Dussart, 2000; Medicine, 2001) and even obfuscates the inspiration for Western feminism (Wagner, 2004).

There has been a long history of undervaluing women's technological skill and knowledge as contributions to prehistory and history (Owen, 2005; Adovasio et al., 2007; Frink, 2009). Ethnoarchaeology is a discipline that as its foundation offers to bridge transformations in knowledge, materials, and technologies between the past and the present. Thus, ethnoarchaeologists should be eminently and ethically concerned with respecting participants understanding of their own past, respecting their traditions for safe guarding the past, and for the potential ramifications that their interpretations may have in the present. However, despite the prevalence of women as participants in ethnoarchaeological studies, ethnoarchaeology has not always focused on gender-based knowledge and techniques, even when participants were clearly women. For instance, although even the earliest documented ethnoarchaeological studies focused on women potters (Cushing, 1886; Bunzel, 1929;

Colton, 1953) and ceramic ethnoarchaeology probably represents the largest body of ethnoarchaeological studies (Longacre, 1983; Arnold, 1985; Deal, 1998; etc) few if any have consider the role of gender and female agency (Burns, 1993; Bowser, 2000; Bowser & Patton 2004). Many other ethnoarchaeological studies focused on the visibility of women and use of household space (David, 1971; Yellen, 1977; Binford, 1978; 1987; Hayden, 1979; Hodder, 1982; O'Connell, 1987; Kent, 1995; 1998), but once again examining gendered knowledge and agency has been rare (Moore, 1986; Lyons, 1990). Certainly, it has only been in recent decades, that ethnoarchaeologists have highlighted women as having knowledge and skilled technologies associated with hunting and fishing (Estioko-Griffin & Griffin, 1975; Bodenhorn, 1990; Cooper, 1994; 2000; Brumbach & Jarvenpa, 1997; Lupo & Schmitt, 2002; Jarvenpa & Brumbach, 2006; 2009), agriculture (Casey, 1991; Lyons & D'Andrea, 2003), politics and ceramic technology (Bowser, 2000; Bowser & Patton, 2004), stone tool technology (K.W. Arthur, 2010), and political leadership (Nelson, 2003).

This paper seeks to expand our understanding of women's knowledge and skills through exploring the life experiences of Borada women in southern Ethiopia. By examining status and change in the individual life experiences of women spiritual leaders, community leaders, and artisan potters, I provide a deeper understanding of the tensions, transformations, and oscillations in politics, economy, religious structures, and individual agency concerning gender-based knowledge and technologies.

BORADA ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY, ORAL TRADITION, AND LIFE HISTORIES

At the heart of this paper are the lives of elder Ethiopian women, who live in the highlands of the Rift Valley west of Lake Abaya among the Borada of Ethiopia. The Borada represent one of the 10 Gamo Omotic-speaking (Fleming, 1973; 1976; Hayward, 1998) districts. They number nearly 100,000 people and primarily are subsistence agriculturists, merchants, and material specialists. The Borada material specialists, like other Ethiopian Cushitic, Omotic, and Semitic speaking societies (Cerulli, 1956; Shack, 1964; Hallpike, 1968; H.S. Lewis, 1970; Cassiers, 1975; Todd, 1977; Haberland, 1984; also see Itagaki this volume) are distinguished by their occupation and segregated into endogamous strata according to patrilineal descent (Straube, 1963; Bureau, 1975; 1981; Halperin & Olmstead, 1976; Abélès, 1977; 1978). In the past, most Borada divided themselves into three strata: *mala* [high prestige farmers and weavers]; *hilancha/tsoma chinasha* [low prestige potters and ironsmiths]; and *hilancha/tsoma degala* [lowest prestige and hideworkers]. Today, a majority of artisans prefer to be referred to as *hilancha* (professional artisan) rather than *tsoma*, though the latter term is widely used.

I first began to study Borada culture in association with ethnoarchaeological research among *hilancha qachay* or hideworkers in the mid-1990s (Weedman, 2002a; 2002b; 2005; 2006; K.W. Arthur, 2008), which was contemporary with studies conducted by John Arthur with potters in other Gamo districts (J.W. Arthur, 2002; 2003; 2006; 2009; and article in this volume). These studies led us to orga-

nize a series of projects between 2005 and 2012⁽¹⁾ that focused on the development of identity and hereditary-occupational groups. My role in this project (with my assistant Yohannes Ethiopia Tocha)⁽²⁾ has been to work within Borada communities opening a dialogue that would precedent Borada oral traditions and worldviews in the interpretation of their material culture, technology, and history.

We combined ethnoarchaeological research with oral traditions and life histories, to ensure that stakeholders were not segregated from their past and that we would not reduce their culture to a simple model of the past. As well acknowledged by ethnoarchaeologists, themselves, in our efforts to create alternative models for the past, we often study indigenous non-Western cultures in Africa with the potential result of indiscriminately portraying Africans as if they had no past but remained in a stagnant Paleolithic or Neolithic lifestyle into the present (Agorsha, 1990; MacEachern, 1996; Schmidt & Walz, 2006). Essentially, ethnoarchaeologists are caught at a crossroad between cultural anthropologists, who more commonly view ethnography as experience, dynamic, and transformative (Fabien, 1983; Behar, 1995; Wilmsen, 1999), and archaeologists who continue to call on ethnoarchaeologists to create scientific models of culture (e.g., for critiques see Gero, 1990; Mason, 2000). Our dilemma is academic and political, it is clearly unethical to reduce the lives of living human beings to numbers and equations and to portray them as having a never changing past and present, for to do so is demeaning, ethnocentric, and segregates people from their past (Meskell, 2005). As a solution, increasingly archaeologists have turned to offering indigenous peoples' oral traditions as the primary chronicle of the past (Crowell et al., 2001; Castañeda & Matthews, 2008; Mortensen & Hollowell, 2009; Smith & Wateron, 2009). In addition, although very few ethnoarchaeologists have incorporated life histories into their studies (for exceptions see Donley, 1987; Donley-Reid, 1990a; 1990b; Jarvenpa & Brumbach, 2006), this approach is essential for a nuanced understanding of gender-based knowledge and techniques. Importantly this methodology serves to illuminate how changes within an individual's life can lead to a better understanding of the complexities of gender relationships and identities and how these relate to use of space, material culture, and technological knowledge (Donley, 1987; Donley-Reid, 1990a; 1990b; Jarvenpa & Brumbach, 2006; 2009). Subsequently, it becomes very difficult to project the present onto the past in a static manner. Instead men's and women's narratives meaningfully demonstrate how their status, repertoire of knowledge, and their relationships to space and material culture change.

Thus, I encouraged Borada elders to share their oral traditions (narratives that extend back before an individual's own life experience generally passed down from previous generations) and oral histories (an individual's personal memories concerning what they experienced and witnessed, Vansina, 1985: 3–9). Although I knew some of the elders from my previous research, I first went to the government office in each Borada community and introduced the project goals. There I told local officials that I would like to speak with village elders about their history. The next day a group of elders, usually men, would appear and sometimes after explaining our interest in history, they would go and find other elders whom they thought and respected as knowledgeable in history. I interviewed over 50 Borada men, usually in group interviews. However in subsequent interviews, I interviewed

specific elders who I either met through the group interviews or elders who were known in the community to have knowledge of history but because of illness or age were unable to leave their households. I began interviews with broad questions, about what they knew about Borada history and as interviews progressed I requested more detailed information about specific events. Most of the interviews were voice recorded.⁽³⁾ Borada men provided detailed information about the history of settlement and warfare, a history rich in external interactions and change and thus they are particularly salient for discerning transformations in gender and material culture, as a result of the introduction of global religions and national political policies.

My interviews with women took the form of life histories rather than oral traditions. Initially, I began interviewing women by asking them what they knew about Borada history. Most women were reluctant to speak about the past in terms of oral traditions and specific historical events, but were more eager to talk about their life histories and reveal the important markers in their lives. So, I began to ask women about their specific life histories, which revealed the transformations in their daily lives in relationship to religion, politics, and technology. I interviewed over 20 women usually as individuals in their households or in small groups. Women seldom came to the government office to meet with us. Instead, I met women through our ethnoarchaeological household and community surveys conducted between 2006 and 2007 through which I came to know which women were political leaders, religious leaders and artisans. Like my interviews with men, I began my interviews with women as semi-structured, asking a broad question such as what is your earliest memory, what are the changes that you have seen in your life, and what are some of the most important times of your life. Women seemed at ease answering these questions and needed very little encouragement to reveal their life histories. In subsequent interviews with the same women, I would then ask more particular questions concerning events in their lives based either on what I had learned in other interviews or in the interview with that particular woman. I also voice recorded these interviews. Women's narratives revealed that different caste groups were associated with different levels of prestige, purity/pollution, and power that restricted social interactions, material use and production, use of space (eating, household space, marriage, burials, etc.) and access to leadership positions as noted in other parts of the world among caste societies (Hocart, 1950; Leach, 1960; Dumont, 1970; Tuden & Plotnicov, 1970; Sterner & David, 1991; Tamari, 1991).

Importantly as I outline first below, I began to notice in women's narratives that their memories shared an emphasis on the importance of life rituals that marked social changes in their lives such as birth, puberty, marriage, leadership, and death; in turn these life markers served to elucidate past Borada philosophies concerning history, gender, and religion. In the remainder of this paper, I provide details from the life histories of women religious leaders, political leaders, and artisans to illustrate how changes in politics and religion impacted their knowledge and technologies.

BORADA HISTORY, GENDER, AND RELIGION

An elder woman, who was a well-known spiritual leader in her community, provided one of the key philosophical tenants of the Borada worldview (Fig. 1). She told me that “history was like a snake and that in the past, stone, trees, and water had their own culture and all things must change” (Interview June 10, 2011). She said there was a common verse spoken to youth from elders “*Sho Sha mela pota*,” which means never die, never get sick, always be young like a snake. She elaborated that people, earth, and animals are like a snake that sheds its skin; they do not really die but keep changing (Bureau, 1983 for snake symbolism among the Gamo; and elsewhere in Africa, Walz, 2009). This verse crystalizes one of the important tenants of Borada indigenous philosophy that Life is about constant change.

Many Borada in the past believed that transformations during an individual’s life were essential and if people did not change like a snake then they were considered to be worthless, infertile—*tuna!* In the past, most elders recalled that *mala* obtained prestige and dignity through rites of passage or *asa naha detsa*, which had four stages: birth (*yella*), seclusion (*dume*), private feast incorporation in the home with neighbors (*bulacha*), and public incorporation at the market place (*sofe*). In the Borada past, rites of passage marked important social distinctions, as is well documented in other literature (van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1964; 1969; and in Ethiopia see Thubauville this volume, as well as Hamar, 1996; Freeman, 1997; 2002; Kassam, 1999).



Fig. 1. Borada Maro.

For many Borada the rituals marking different stages in the rites of passage are symbolic of an individual's life cycle: their birth (*yella*), their seclusion in their natal home as a youth (*dume*), their marriage and creation of a new household (*bulacha*), and their period of public responsibility and elderhood (*sofe*). An unborn child is referred to as a *gatchino*, and Borada individuals in their social gestations through rites of passage are often referred to as *gatchino*. By age three when breast feeding is complete, most people begin to drop the terms *uka* for new born and *nayta* for infant and use *na'a* for boy and *nayo* for girl, at which point there is a naming ceremony for the child. After the onset of puberty young men (*fanta*) and women (*gelao*) then transitioned from youth through rites of passage titled, *qatsara*, which refers to the circumcision they experienced in the past to become full people, *asa gama gakis*, or more specifically women (*mishero*) or men (*wodala*) eligible for marriage (*macho eko*). After marriage rites men retain their title of *wodala*, but become eligible to participate in society as political and religious leaders. Women continue to be *mishero* for 2–3 years after marriage rites, and after the birth of their first child they became *misher*. A man who has adult and married children is referred to as *chima*, and a woman past child-bearing years, *baltita*. It was only in this latter stage in life that women participated as political and religious leaders in society.

Artisans did not participate in the final incorporation or *sofe* for puberty rites of passage, which supported the concept that they could not serve in leadership positions within the community and were not considered “full fertile citizens”. Furthermore, Borada concepts of status and gender were intertwined. Artisans, whether women (potters) or men (hideworkers and ironsmiths), were often associated with the feminine reflecting their knowledge and responsibility to mediate nature by transforming and creating raw materials into valuable goods. An elder artisan wife and husband said to me that in the past *they had little work and the mala gave them food and little respect, the mala would say to me (the husband)—‘you woman take this food’* (Interview June 5, 2008). Thus among some Borada in the past, male artisans were likened to women because they did not own land, did not plant seeds, and they received food in return for their services. One *mala* man told me *men must plant seeds, not women because the earth is like a patient woman, ankara, it holds onto things and gives birth* (Interview July 5, 2007). Full transformation of a plant from a seed to food required *mala* men's and women's shared labor. *Mala* men farmed by planting into the female earth seeds (*yella*) or shoots that were cleaned and separated (*qatsara*). The plant rests (*dume*) in the earth as a fetus (*gatchino*) and grows. Once plants became mature, *mala* women scraped root crops or cut, threshed, and/ground grain crops (all activities considered *qatsara*) followed by storing these plant materials in the ground or pots (*dume*) and finally cooked crops in pots (*bulacha*) and/or sold them at the market (*sofe*). Thus, *mala* men and women shared responsibility in plant (re) production. In contrast, artisan men and women (re) produce material culture without interaction between the sexes. Symbolically artisans represented an aspect of reproduction and fertility that excluded one of the sexes, often viewed as a transgression against *Tsalahay*, as were same sex relationships. Only in ceramic production do men often help with one stage in production the firing of the pots.

This may explain why potters often have a slightly higher and separate status from hideworkers. Thus, sexual relations and other types of interaction between farmers and artisans were commonly viewed as dangerous with the potential to cause infertility. Many in Borada society considered artisans in a constant state of transformation as mediators between pure and impure in their interactions with other Borada and in their creation of impure valueless raw materials to pure valuable materials. In their past roles, a select number of artisans served as healers of infected wounds (as opposed to other forms of illness) and as individuals who performed circumcision. Artisans mediated the relationship between the pure and the impure allowing *mala* to fully transform into healthy adults. Thus, Borada concepts of gender informed the presence of hereditary status groups, as noted in research by Sterner & David (1991) among West African cultures. Borada concepts of gender generally also were expressed in terms of how an individual manipulates the natural world and their ability to instigate life into materials.

Instigation of biological and social change often was marked in Borada rituals by the use of water, trees, and/or caves. These elements were either associated with the beginning of a rites of passage (*yella*) such as when children are named in ceremonies in caves or in sacred groves or in the middle of rites of passage when circumcised young men and women bathed in rivers after seclusion (*dume*). Several Borada elders told me that they believed that there were three wombs in the earth: one in trees particularly the *Eta* tree or *Ficus sur*, one in caves, and one in water—all were portals to the spirit world. According to some oral traditions, the first Borada people emerged from such a portal. As an elder artisan woman stated: *The first people, gatchinos (fetuses) came from the earth and were made from the clay, they came out of the womb of the earth, the caves* (Interview July 8, 2008). For most, *Tsalahay* was the great spirit, who created people from the clay and all other living and non-living things on earth. *Tsalahay* as a spirit was tangibly manifested in the material world (animism) although variation on sex and forms of *Tsalahay* depended on the individual interviewed. Generally, male *Tsalahay* took the form of water, thunder/lightening, trees, sun, wind, lions, and rainbows, while the female *Tsalahay* took primarily the form of the moon, earth, and stone. *Tsalahay* spirits also were associated with introduced religions and peoples from other regions. These spirits were usually considered female, such as *Foreingi Ayenna*, *Arusha*, and *Birbir Marium* (Orthodox Church). The inclusion of Christian spirits in the indigenous belief system suggests a process of syncretism. Written records confirm between 1433–1468 by the northern Ethiopian Christian empire and the Orthodox Church came as far as south as Borada (Azaïs & Chambard, 1931: 260–269; Bureau, 1975; Fanta, 1985; Marcus, 1994: 19–29) and local oral histories suggest that the Protestant Church was introduced in the 1920s. Today there are many elders and fewer youth who continue to believe in the power of *Tsalahay*. Today and in the past, a select few individuals have a unique and important connection to *Tsalahay* in all forms, the *maroti*.

MAROTI (SPIRITUAL LEADERS)

Numerous elders remember a *maro* (singular of *maroti*) as a person who through spiritual inspiration communicated with *Tsalahay* and in the past individuals sought advice from *maroti* if they, their family member, or their crops or animals were experiencing illness or death as the result of a transgression committed against *Tsalahay*. Several, elder women revealed to me through their life histories, how they became *maroti* through social rebirth or rites of passage, and how they used material culture as *maroti* to transform others from a state of *tuna osa* (worthless person or transgressor) to *gesha woga* (person who follows culture correctly).

An elder *mala* woman, revealed to me how she became a *maro*.

One day when I was a child I went to get some grass by the river for the cattle. In the Asha river in Kodo, the spirit caught me and threw me in the river and then took me out. I could not move or speak. My father offered a goat to *Tsalahay* and then I was ok, but I was often sick. After this day, *Tsalahay* came to me often in my dreams. He told me I must sacrifice goats for him and I must speak for him to the people. (Interview June 3, 2008)

Her conversion resonated with life histories from other *maroti*, to whom I spoke. All the *maroti* that I interviewed stated that anyone could become a *maro* regardless of sex or caste group affiliation, though most I interviewed were women and I have yet to meet an artisan *maro*. In their transformation to *maro*, men and women were caught (*batkis*) in spiritual water (*Tsalahay hadtza*). *Maroti*, subsequently experienced a period of seclusion in their household, *dume*, a period when *Tsalahay* initially spoke to them and imparted knowledge of the spirit world. The night and dream time also was considered *dume* for some *maro*, who received spiritual inspiration concerning specific transgressions by individuals who came to seek their advice. After *dume*, their father sacrificed a goat for them at the household near a sacred fire, *bulacha*, and their final transformation was public acceptance, *sofe*, of their new status as *maro*.

Once a woman became a *maro*, she held an essential responsibility in society, as she had important knowledge about how to maintain well-being, fertility, and health by appeasing the spirit world. *Maroti* performed the necessary rituals to help people through specific types of material culture that were not present in other households. Many *maroti* had a special structure next to their house in which they performed their ceremonies. This ritual-house, *Tsalahay ketsa*, had a *tusa* (central house post), but it did not have a bamboo partition that typically divided the residential household. In this ritual-house were wooden benches, smoking pipes, a small drum, a coffee pot, coffee cups, a guitar, and incense. The people sat in the house on wooden benches on north and south side, while the *maro* sat in the western part of the house considered the feminine part of the house and faced the east. The *maro* made and served coffee using a locally made earthenware coffee pot with at least three spouts. While drinking coffee, someone typically played the drum and guitar for many hours inducing rhythmic sounds into the



Fig. 2. *Maro* Divination Stones.

atmosphere. These practices involved the production of very specific materials that would animate all the human senses: taste (coffee), smell (incenses), sound (music), and touch (stones, drums, guitar), to invoke the spirit world of *Tsalahay*. Transformation of the senses through ritual ceremonies for spiritual contact served to induce a trance-like state in the *maro* and her participants (e.g., I.M. Lewis, 1971). After hours of smelling incense and coffee, consuming coffee, and listening to the music, the *maro* addressed each person at a time speaking for *Tsalahay*. The *maro* either conveyed her insights through inspirational dreams or through throwing and interpreting 27 small pebbles (*kora sucha*, Fig. 2). Sometimes individuals were instructed to offer goat and sheep sacrifices to pay for their transgressions, others were told to use particular types of incense and/or to wear particular glass beads for protection against specific *Tsalahay* spirits. Many of the *maroti* I spoke with said that they had worn a *chuba*, a zinc ring with three breasts each for three different aspects of *Tsalahay* (caves, trees, and water).

Although *maroti* served an important function in society, women's acceptance and ability to perform the necessary rituals changed in their lifetime with the beginning of Mengistu's Derg Socialist regime (1974–1991). Under this period, many Borada elders stated that the government invoked campaigns “to educate the people”. These campaigns offered that there should be equality between artisans and farmers, individuals had to abandon their indigenous religion, and in this process gender tasks were transformed. The government achieved this through redistributing land, education programs for the youth, enforcing the destruction of indigenous material culture associated with ritual, and through imprisonment and physical abuse.

The Derg tried to teach us that all are equal, all are human beings. People said ok, but we were afraid of the government, so we said this, but we [*mala*] did not agree. ...the Derg said you have to drop sacrifice, *gimuwa*, *halaka*, *maro*, etc. and work for the government. They would give punishment for breaking rules—like going to jail, beating, or paying money. (Interview July 5, 2008)

Maroti stated that they were forced to abandon their practices under the threat of jail and beatings. Several also stated that they could not show me their *chuba* ring, divination stones, or multi-spouted coffee pots because they were forced to break them and throw them into their gardens by government officials during the Socialist regime.

The Derg forcefully took my beads, drum and guitar. They forced me to work in the garden and told me not to waste my time with other things. They came and checked that I was doing my garden work. (Interview July 7, 2008)

The acceptance of their position as *maro* also fluctuated in women's lives as they felt not only the pressures of the Derg, but of the increased reliance on Christianity as indigenous religious practices became forbidden by the government. Several expressed that they felt societal pressures to abandon their positions as *maroti*.

I told my husband I am going be *maro*. And my husband became angry at me. He said to me, 'No! You can't be *maro*! What are you talking about?' He rejected the idea. And on another day again *Tsalahay* came to me in my dreams and said, 'Did you tell your husband that you are going to be *maro*?' I answered him 'I did but my husband does not respect that.' Next time *Tsalahay* came to me and said 'Go to your husband and tell him again.' I tried three times but my husband never heard me. And on another night again he [*Tsalahay*] said, 'If your husband does not accept me he can no live longer in this world.' And I told him [my husband] this again but he doesn't like *Tsalahay*. Finally, *Tsalahay* made him sick and killed him. So, I lost my first husband by *Tsalahay* and my first son, too. ...[Later in interview] I told my second husband what happened to me when I was at my first husband's house. I told everything to my second husband and he accepted all things. My second husband said that, 'Don't worry I will. I will offer everything that your *Tsalahay* needs.' My husband sacrificed oxen and goat for the first time at his house and then I started to celebrate the *Tsalahay* days. Because my second husband understood me so I was free to celebrate. ...[Later in interview] And in very recent times, I stopped the *Tsalahay* practice. Suddenly something from the sky called me. It was the middle of the night and I was afraid. It looks like I don't know and you can't identify exactly what it is. But by the time I gave my head over to that thing it was saying to me, 'Don't follow the previous thing! I am your God!

Don't worry about anything. Wherever you go I will be with you! So don't celebrate the *Tsalahay* days. From today you will be free from *Tsalahay*'s control. I am your God! I need you and you are my child!' He sent a big rope to me through my house roof and then I thought shall I leave *Tsalahay* or not? I was contemplating with my mind for a long time and I decided to change my religion. I believe in God. (Interview June 3, 2008)

Although some did abandon the practice after the Derg, others changed the way they practiced their rituals. For instance, instead of having a separate structure a *maro* used her house and a single spouted coffee pot, sprinkled her divination stones around the house or stored them hidden and practiced secretly at night. Once the current Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF began in 1991) government took office, they began to use multi-spouted coffee pots, drums, guitars, and special stones once again. However, because many people had already converted to Christianity, their services are not as in high of demand today and they do not use a separate ritual structure. Even though there is no government punishment for their practice, community conversion to Christianity and pressures, leave some still concerned about speaking openly about their practices and beliefs.

Christianity and other world religions, began to take hold during Megistu's Derg Socialist regime, a point in time, when many of the elders I had spoken to were either beginning their married life or married with children and settling into adult life. The destruction of indigenous material culture and religion as the result of Derg policies served to diminish the once valuable position *maroti*. In addition, other positions of prestige for women were extinguished such as *gimuwati*, women who in the past were responsible for leading rituals to help ensure that the community honored the spirit world to maintain balance, harmony and fertility.

GIMUWATI (FEMALE COMMUNITY LEADERS)

Although much has been written about men's responsibilities and rituals, as *halakati*, in the Gamo highlands (Sperber, 1972; Abélès, 1979; Bureau, 1981; Freeman, 1997; 2002) little has been published to date concerning the female initiates, *gimuwa* (exception a mention in Fanta, 1985: 37–28 written as *astruwaa* the name of their ritual, also see Olmstead, 1997 for an example of a Gamo woman who was a local administrative leader, *balabat*). Many elder Borada recalled that *gimuwati* along with their male counterparts, *halakati* or *wodalati*, were viewed as sharing in responsibilities and as balancing one another. It was these Borada *mala* men (*halakati* and *wodalati*) and women (*gimuwati*) that in various communities were transformed through rites of passage, and held responsibility for ensuring the rain and the fertility of the community, crops, and animals through periodic animal, barley, and butter offerings to *Tsalahay* at sacred springs, caves, and trees.

A great number of Borada elders stated that a woman who became *gimuwa* was always past child bearing years, married or widowed, of the *mala* caste group, and had many children. *Gimuwa* were described to me often as *goba*, very active, intelligent, respected, and held dignity in the community. Many elders



Fig. 3. *Mala*/Farmer household in Borada.

stated that in order for a woman to be *gimuwa*, she had to be hard-working, economically prosperous, generous and industrious. Even today, as indicated by our ethnoarchaeological studies of two Borada communities, the prosperity of ritual leader households is evident not only in the amount of material culture but also in the type, size, and number of their household structures. *Mala* households are on average 30 m² in size with large household compounds averaging 435 m² (Fig. 3). Wealthier *mala* households have a separate structure for children to sleep in, a separate weaving house, and/or a cooking house. *Mala* own many domesticated stock and they also have more land and grow more and a wider variety of crops (average 15 different types of crops per household among *mala* compared to 10 for *hilancha/tsoma*). They grow luxury crops, such as grains, coffee, sugarcane, and tobacco and as such are able to hold ritual redistribution feasts associated with rites of passage and ancestor veneration. In particular, J.W. Arthur (2002; 2003) found that high caste and wealthier households have ceramic vessels related to their consumption of high-status foods such as grains, dairy, and beer.

Well, to be *gimuwa* you have to have a lot of property and you have to have had children and leave having children in the past [menopause] and your husband has to be *halaka* and also you have to be well-known among the village people. If a woman has these criteria, she can be *gimuwa* without any doubt. Ok, when I say property it includes land, house, bead, chair, clothes, animal and money and etc. You must have these things and also you have to have people working for you and your husband has to agree. (Interview June 1, 2008)

Like *maroti*, *gimuwati* women had to earn their status as *gimuwa* by participating in rituals that served to mark their transition from an ordinary person to a person with prestige and dignity through social birth, *asa naha detsa*. *Gimuwati* initiates became birthed by announcing themselves first to their husband near their household hearth, where infants are born, and then to other family members and friends. A woman in transition to becoming *gimuwa* was often referred to as *gatchino* (fetus). Like a newborn, a *gimuwa*, after she announced herself, spent nine weeks in *dume* or alone near her hearth in her household. *Baltiti* or elder women past child bearing years, prepared and brought her rich foods called *katcha*—sorghum, barley, and buttered porridge. Previous *gimuwa* impart their knowledge to her concerning her impending social role during *dume*. The *gimuwa* never cut her hair or bathed, as she was symbolically gestating into another social identity. While she was in *dume*, her female siblings and affines as well as neighbors came together to her house to grind grain (*gatcha*) in preparation for the coming feasts.

Then like a newborn infant, the *gimuwa* was incorporated in a private ceremony at her household. The *gimuwa*'s feast was a private incorporation (*bulacha*) called *Ayes Yapaon*—meaning mother's sacred day. Foods were served in large jars and platters, which are still common at elite households (J.W. Arthur, 2002; 2003; 2006). The initiate bathed in local water prior to the ceremony, instigating her transition. She wore a locally made woven dress (*tibabe*), head scarf (*kaba*), and wrap (*jano*). She had a walking stick (*gumbuwa*), a symbol of power, and she wore zinc earrings (*hayita chupa*) for spiritual protection, a zinc head band (*wogoro*, Fig. 4) that symbolized female fertility, and clay or zinc anklets (*sagayo*) that symbolized female beauty and strength. At the ceremony, people blessed her by giving her grass and putting butter on her head. There were speeches in honor of her life and her dignity and prestige near the sacred fire. People sang "*Abolay ne*



Fig. 4. A *Gimuwa* headpiece/crown.

hola”—you are famous, great! Similar songs were sung to lead hunters and male ritual leaders.

The day after her *bulacha*, the *gimuwa* initiate went to the market for *sofe*, also called *Tora Kama* or spear power day. In the past, when women were circumcised during puberty rites of passage ceremonies, they removed the clitoris or *tora*/spear, which was considered analogous to the male penis and thus must be removed to instigate female fertility. The *gimuwa* was past her point of biological fertility, and thus many Borada considered that she could hold the *tora* or spear, which was symbolic of fertility in the form of power! At the market place, the *gimuwa* wore the regalia described above and she sat in a special place called *marache*, which also means intestines that are used to divine the future, the implication is that it is a special place of power for future well-being.

After a woman completed her rites of passage and became *gimuwa*, she served as a community leader with fame and respect and was a sought after decision maker in the community. *Gimuwati* women often blessed women and their children. If a woman was sick, had a new born, or needed help the *gimuwa* often assisted. If there were disagreements between men and women, she frequently settled the problem. In several interviews, elders recalled when a man abused a woman or forbid her from participating in female rituals, the *gimuwa* would organize the elder women in a protest outside the man's house in which they pounded the ritual drum, in essence shaming him. She also often led the women at funeral ceremonies and weddings. *Gimuwati* were very powerful in times of drought, as one elder man told me:

The women [led by *Gimuwati*] in the village, when they were leaving their village, they said that in our village these elder men didn't take responsibility in our village and because of this our village has drought. If they [men] sacrifice for the spirit *Tsalahay*, it will be okay. Here now there is no rain and we are migrating from the village and the cause of this is they [men] didn't sacrifice for the spirit. (Interview June 2, 2007)

Thus, *gimuwati* were respected leaders by men and women in their community. Furthermore, in the memories of many elders the *gimuwati* like *halakati* and *wodalati*, were responsible for appeasing the spirits of *Tsalahay* through offering barley porridge at specific trees, caves, and water sources associated with the power of *Tsalahay*. Male ritual-political leaders also offered animals in honor of *Tsalahay* and ancestors when misfortune occurred in a community and they performed ritual offerings annually during *Tompe* celebrations in June near the summer solstice. Women community leaders led an annual *Astiro* ceremony in December near the winter solstice on a full moon. Many Borada still refer to the full moon as *kumata gena* or pregnant woman. Annually, the *gimuwa* and the elder women met at their *dubusha*, a forested area with a spring, which was often located in the western areas of a community as west was associated with the setting of the sun and femininity. There, they painted particular boulders with butter as an offering to *Tsalahay*. They prayed to *Tsalahay* to bring rain and fertility to women by singing and playing the drums and carrying grass (*mat*) on their shoulders and butter (*oyesa*,

but made from milk *maat*) on their heads, symbols of renewal, coolness, and fertility.

I did [when I was *gimuwa*] when a disagreement happens, I made peace between people and between husband and wife. In the old day we went to *Astiro*. We stayed for one week. We ate porridge and we all are old women during this time, beside us no one entered into our sacred forest. *Gimuwa* led the women, and made offering to *Tsalahay* [by putting butter on rocks]. *Gimuwa* asked for human fertility, for cow milk, for children to grow without disease, for life to be good for women and their houses. (Interview July 8, 2007)

Over the past 80 years or so there have been substantial changes in Borada lifeways that include the erosion of women's power and status in society. One rainy afternoon an elder and a community ritual leader said to me:

These days we are divided we are Muslim, Protestant, and Orthodox, we no longer sacrifice for the ancestors and for *Tsalahay* near big trees, for the rain for the wellness of us all, we are divided and this is why we have famine and drought. (Interview May 5, 2008)

When he spoke about being divided, he meant not only were people divided in terms of their beliefs, but they now believed they were divided or separate from natural world of rain, sun, moon, animals, plants, and stones and held no responsibility towards these realms. This change in worldview, has had an impact on gender, political-religious positions, as well as technology.

Unlike *maroti* who sometimes hid their practices or renewed them after the end of the Derg, oral histories indicate that women left their *gimuwati* positions



Fig. 5. Ritual area in Borada being mined for its rich soils and trees depleting the forest.

under the force of the Derg and women are no longer holding the title (see the above quote under *maroti*). Many *gimuwa* stated the Derg government forced them to throw out their headpiece and other regalia, although some managed to hide them. Furthermore in some communities, the areas of former *gimuwati* rituals for *Astiro* ceremonies that included sacred springs and forest, have been destroyed. People are capping the sacred springs for wells, mining the soils for rich nutrients and placing it on household gardens, and harvesting the trees for household hearths (Fig. 5). While some Borada women acknowledge that education is now available to girls and that women have the decision to marry whom they want, they also lament an absence of their voice in community decision making. Now some young Borada women are seeking respect and dignity through other occupations primarily through seeking education and wage employment.

In the past, women once held highly respected positions as *gimuwati*, who conferred dignity and respect, protected women, and helped to ensure fertility. Unlike the *maro*, who could be either an artisan or a *mala*, the *gimuwa* women belonged only to the *mala* caste group. Their status and rituals served to exemplify the justification of the social structure and the consolidation of power by the *mala* sanctified through the control of fertility rites in honor of *Tsalahay* and their spirit world. However, the materials and regalia used by *gimuwati* and *maroti*'s as symbols of their power and as means for interacting with the spirit world were made by Borada artisans.

HILANCHA TUGAY (PROFESSIONAL POTTERS)

In the past artisans made special items for *maroti* and *gimuwati*, such as multi-spouted coffee pots, smoking pipes, incense burners, special jars for feasts, head rests, foot washing bowls, offering bowls, musical instruments, chairs, capes, bangles, rings, earrings, anklets, and headpieces. Women of the former *chinasha* endogamous-hereditary group currently known as *hilancha tugay* apprenticed their daughters to follow their trade and become potters. Potters are taught by practitioners, whose knowledge and technology is needed to create ceramics (bowls, plates, jars, spindle whorls, cups, hearth rests, and coffee pots) used in almost every household and in the past special ritual forms.

As stated above, artisan (re) production of material culture cast them as feminine and as mediators. They transformed raw materials from a worthless unfertile state, *tuna*, through symbolic rites of passage to items with life and power (*fayaa misha*), such as ceramics, leather goods, and metal. While the association of iron objects in East Africa have been commonly associated with a symbolic lifecycle and fertility that encodes insurance of human and crop fertility (Herbert, 1993; Schmidt, 1997), other forms of material production have not been explored from this perspective. Borada artisans regarded their technical knowledge as particularly important and actively protect it by practicing their trades inside a structure out of the sight of others and by using a ritual language or argot.

Numerous potters, particularly elder potters recalled in conversations with me the symbolic association of pottery production with the lifecycle. In the first stage,

yella, the clay is separated or birthed. As a potter begins the ceramic production cycle, she starts by separating the clay from its source in the female earth and bringing it to her household. She collects two types of clay. Near the household hearth, she mixes black male/father clay (*ade*, which makes the pot strong) with red female/mother clay (*macha*, which makes the pot easy to shape), and water (instigation source), in symbolic reproduction. She also adds in broken bits of previous pots, grog, to the mixture. The grog is symbolic of spiritual/soul infusion. As stated above, the household hearth is associated with reproduction of human beings—it is where husband and wife sleep and consummation takes place, it is where women rest after their pregnancy and during leadership rites of passage, and it is the place of human births.

Before a pot is fired, it is often brought into the household and placed near the hearth (Fig. 6). The pot is a *gatchino*, a fetus, it rests near the hearth in *dume*, just as a child after birth or a *gimuwa* after her announcement of her position. The length of time pots rest near the hearth depends on whether it is the dry or wet season, one week to one month. Ceramic pots, while formed and dried near the hearth are not fired in an internal household hearth. Instead, they are fired outside but usually near the household and often on the western side of the property. Households are often oriented so that the feminine hearth area is on the western side and the masculine portion of the household with the erect household post is located in the east with the rising of the sun. Thus, fire inside the household or household property is symbolic of female biological/technological reproduction. Fires outside household properties are associated with male rituals (even in the *gimuwa Astiro* ceremony—it is a man who brings the wood and establishes the fire) and symbolic of social/cultural reproduction. Husbands and sons often assist potters with building the fire and firing pots. This joining of the pots together at firing is considered private incorporation or *bulacha*. Lastly, pots are either then



Fig. 6. Pots resting in *dume* near hearth in household.

taken to the market to sell, sold to local farmers in exchange for food or land use, or in the past given to ritual leaders and used at sacred forests and springs. This phase of a pot is considered public incorporation or *sofe*. At this point, the pot is considered to be a “full”, “strong”, and “fertile” object, *faya misha*.

When pots break they are repaired and or reused for storing grain. Pots are never simply discarded, they are carefully placed outside on the edges of the house wall. Individual sherds from broken pots are used for gathering fire, ash, coverings other pots, applying butter to hides, holding candles, and creating a foundation for a new house, and in ritual contexts as part of girls and boys puberty rites of passage ceremony (*woshe*), which clearly speaks to their continued efficacy. As far as I know there are no formal ceremonies for the “death” of a pot, but neither is a pot simply thrown in the trash as most Westerners would do. After secondary use, pots may either go into the ground, where they are considered dead or *hykes*—like the material aspect of a human being or they are collected for grog for reuse in clays to produce new pottery. When it is reused in a pot it is considered reborn (*zare yellelsa*) as humans who become ancestors.

Thus in their symbolic “re”production of material culture, artisans exemplified the commonly held Borada belief that even the inanimate world was full of life and spirit. Ceramic production is highly symbolic encapsulating the Borada worldview associated with the lifecycle, change, and status. The symbolic system probably served as a mnemonic device for the complex knowledge and skills associated with successful ceramic production. Women begin to acquire the skills and knowledge associated with pottery production at an early age and proceed to apprentice themselves to practitioners until several years after they are married. While they begin their training in their mother’s house, once they are married they must transfer their skills to a new community and re-evaluate what they have learned about clay types, location, ceramic forms, use, and style, drying seasons and timing, types of firing woods, seasons, etc. in their new social context. The ceramic production cycle is symbolic of the human lifecycle and embodies notions of transformation and change in a social context. J.W. Arthur’s paper in this volume describes ceramic technology in other Gamo districts (Ochollo, Zada, and Doko) and how individuals renovate technology and knowledge within changing social contexts.

Artisan women often spoke about how changes in the political climate during the late 1970s led to increased rights to land and respect for artisans. Several artisans served as government officials in land redistribution and enforcement of equality. In some ways artisans have gained equality with farmers, as they now participate in work parties together, can attend school, and are buried in the same cemeteries. However, with the opening of the market system and increased presence of industrial goods, their knowledge and skills as artisans was less in demand. Yet, they gained access to land which allowed them to increase their agricultural production.

The Derg changed many things, before we [artisans] were not considered as full humans, we lived tightly together and had no land, we worked hard and got very little, we had to kiss the hand and leg of *mala*, we washed their

legs, when we would gain any wealth, the *mala* would accuse us of transgressing spirits and we would be forced to give it away. The Derg government gave us land. After the Derg, *mala* began requesting land back, but we refuse. (Interview June 28, 2008)

Today artisans often ask me how I can help them provide a new market for their goods. The widespread introduction of industrial goods beginning in the 1970s coupled with the forced abandonment of indigenous ideals means that artisan production has become a part time endeavor and many items are no longer produced. Plastic water cans, plates, and cups and metal pots and pans are available inexpensively and in abundance at markets and town shops and have begun to replace the ceramic production of small plates and large jars. Porcelain tea cups have completely replaced the production of local ceramic coffee cups. Potters no longer produce the items discussed above associated with *maro* and *gimuwa* rituals, and as the result of the adoption of Protestant Christianity that forbids smoking, potters rarely make smoking pipes. Furthermore, changes in landownership policies coupled with increased population pressures mean that some potters are beginning to have to pay for clay and fuel woods are harder to find. Furthermore, while attributing a symbolic “life” to materials has not been eliminated, most potters only continue to recognize the symbolism associated with procurement of the clay and clay types. Today one may observe outside the household hideworkers shaping stone or scraping hides or potters forming pots, while in the past most artisans stated that to protect their knowledge and skills from others they worked inside and near their hearths the place for successful (re) production.

Even though the Derg tried to instill a new ideology equalizing farmers and artisans, and artisans generally believe that their lives are better, there continues to exist considerable discrimination against artisans by other members of the community. There are still strong prohibitions against marriage and even flirtation between members of different hereditary-endogamous groups. As part of my ethnographic work since 1996, I have collected extensive kinship information and found in no case a marriage between an artisan and a farmer. Few artisan children go to school because parents are unable to afford the fees for supplies, uniforms, and lunches. Artisan economic conditions are thus still poor compared to local farmers, as indicated by our ethnoarchaeological studies of two communities. Most *hilancha*/artisans live at the edge of villages near roads and/or on very steep slopes with poor agricultural soils. *Hilancha* households are smaller (Fig. 7) than *mala* households (average 24.4 m² compared to 30 m² for *mala*) and household compounds are smaller (average 159.45 m² compared to 435 m² for *mala*). Artisans also have smaller agricultural land with less variety of crops, own very little livestock, and fewer household items, though more material culture associated with their particular trade.

In addition, an oral tradition we recorded and refer to as the Iron Box Tradition symbolically relates how Christianity affected indigenous religion and the status of artisans. The Iron Box Tradition outlines how ironsmiths misused their technology by locking *Tsalahay*’s son into an iron box. Iron is essential to Borada for the

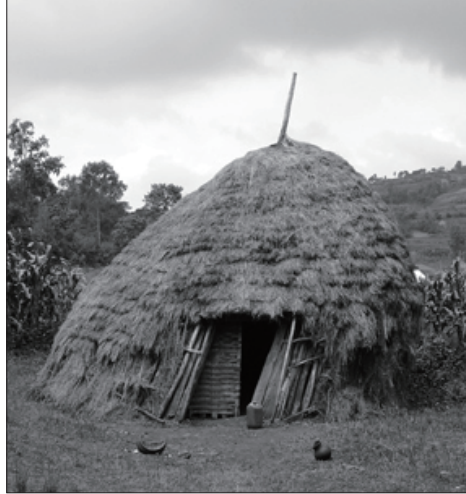


Fig. 7. Artisan house in Borada.

production of spears, a symbol of power and strength, and for its production of hoes, axes, and plows that penetrate the earth in symbolic reproduction maintaining fertile fields of food and hence human fertility. Other elders told us that iron boxes were caskets that elite Amhara Christians introduced to the region during Emperor Haile Selassie's feudalistic reign 1893–1935. By locking *Tsalahay's* son in an iron box, his transitional passage to ancestor was disrupted by blocking his body from the earth and his soul from the spirit ancestors. An iron box would also provide a barrier to water (in the river) which would normally instigate an individual into a new status. Rather than use iron to produce spears or agricultural tools, the artisans overstepped their boundaries using iron to disrupt rather than instigate fertility and the continuation of life. *Tsalahay's* punishment for this violation of the natural order by the misuse of iron was thus to demote ironsmiths to low status and restrict their interactions with others creating the indigenous hereditary divisions of *hilancha/tsoma* and *mala*. Furthermore, this oral tradition may allude to a time when the Borada blamed the elite for abandoning their indigenous practices and instigating drought, metaphorically phrased in the sun, iron, and water, all key factors in maintaining the agricultural system. The tradition serves as a metaphor for the philosophical and structural changes that occurred in Borada society as the result of the introduction of Christianity.

Life histories and oral traditions focused on the introduction of Christianity and changes in the national government indicate that artisans have altered their status and technology in society. Yet, it is remarkable that in southern Ethiopia despite these changes potters continue to make a livelihood based on their skills, when in most other parts of the world earthenware ceramics have become obsolete for everyday use. While particular ritual items have been eliminated from their repertoire as the result of Derg policies to eliminate indigenous religious practices and Christian limitations, other items have either remained relatively the same

for example single spouted coffee pots, cooking plates, bowls, jars, and hearth supports or changed slightly in form. Furthermore, although Derg policies did serve to better the lifestyle of artisans, economically they still suffer from a decrease in demand of their goods, owning smaller and fewer agricultural lands and livestock, few can afford to send their children to school, and socially marriage is still forbidden between artisans and farmers. Over the last 100 years, Borada integration into national and global economies, politics, and religions, has provided opportunities for new sources and instigations of transformation for women as artisans, religious leaders, and community leaders.

CONCLUSION

Amadiume (1997) argued that Westernization through Christianity and colonialism has brought violence and increased reliance on patriarchal and patrilineal descent systems in Africa. Similarly, Borada women have taught me that in the past women had substantial power, dignity, and respect eroded by the introduction of new religions and Westernization. Women's life histories revealed not only the positions of significant power and knowledge that women held in Borada society in the past, but also how the Borada symbolized the human lifecycle rituals in the production of material culture integrating the human with the material world in reproduction and use of household and community space. Women, like men, gained prestige and dignity through symbolic lifecycle rituals that brought them closer to their own spiritual form through birth, adulthood, marriage, and as described here leadership rituals. Women held positions of high respect as *maroti* religious leaders and *gimuwati* community leaders, and many Borada respected them for their knowledge and technology of the spirit world. Artisan women associated the production of pottery with stages in the human transformation rituals, which served to provide status to the materials they made as well as reinforced the spatial and complex technological knowledge associated with their trade.

The Borada rites of passage had four stages as exemplified in this paper for women leaders *maro* and *gimuwati* and material culture created by feminine artisans (male and female). All were instigated or birthed with spirit infused water near the hearth (*yella*), then secluded near the household hearth for a period of resting and protection in their transitional state where they were endowed with knowledge and health (*dume*), subsequently they participated in a private incorporation in the home with neighbors in the form of a feast with a sacred fire for people and a gathering of pots in firing for transformation (*bulacha*), and finally all are incorporated in a public ceremony at the market place and/or a sacred forest or spring (*sofe*). I suggest that this parallel may serve to mitigate the conflict between male and female, pure and impure, and particularly farmer and artisan, the latter of who do not fully complete rites of passage (e.g. Turner, 1968; 1969). Generally the Borada divide themselves into hereditary-endogamous groups based on occupation, particularly artisan from non-artisan. This highlights recognition that artisan production of materials is conducted by a single sex (generally women make pots and men work metal and hides), which is considered unnatural and thus

results in artisan status as pollutive in society. At the same time, however, in non-artisan oral traditions, such as in the Iron Box Tradition, artisans wield a great deal of power in their ability to create a worthless item into something valuable. Underlying artisan ascription of rites of passage to material culture is their technological knowledge to control change. By artisan symbolically reproducing material culture from a worthless to valuable state, an artisan emphasizes their power to control the process of change, despite the discrimination they are subjected to in society as a result of their material production. Change as indicated earlier in this paper is one of the founding tenants of Borada philosophy, "*Sho Sha mela pota*," which means never die, never get sick, always be young like a snake, i.e., shed your original skin but continue to survive as a renewed snake. Change exists but within a structure, the snake sheds its skin becoming a new snake, not an entirely new creature, just as through rites of passage an individual or material culture change their status but do not change their inherent being or structure. This structure survived in women's narratives and was made explicit in their descriptions of their transformations into leaders and in their transformations of material culture.

By combining ethnoarchaeology with oral tradition and life histories, I was immersed in a richly textured world that deeply valued women as well as men and perceived materials, as equally full of life and as demanding of respect as humans. Exploring Borada history through women's life histories revealed that unlike Western culture which typically segregates the human world from the material world, indigenous Borada worldview is similar to other indigenous worldviews in their recognition of an important relationship and interconnection between human, natural, and spiritual realms. The Borada indigenous worldview emphasized the process of change as a powerful means and consistent aspect of life. Importantly, change is continually instigated by the fluid interaction between humans and the rest of the material world.

Women's life histories revealed that material culture has a rites of passage that served as a mnemonic device for women to organize their complex knowledge concerning material production as well as served to ideologically connect humans and other aspects of the material and spiritual world, ultimately revealing an explanation for spatial variation of materials and practice in the landscape. Women's use of space changed as they gestated through rites of passage from one status to another, space that parallels that of material culture production. Thus women's actions and status are tangible as visible markers on the landscape and in their material culture structured by their ideology surrounding rites of passage. Although these spaces and objects embody their structured engagement between the physical and spiritual worlds, they are not stagnate. For example, today and the past the western portions of a community and household are still considered feminine. However, the practical use of these areas has changed. Under their earlier indigenous philosophy the household hearth was the place of human and material reproduction, production, transfer of knowledge and a place of seclusion for women who obtained political and religious status. Today, the household hearth is no longer used as a place of seclusion for political and religious transformation, but it is still considered feminine and associated with a place women seclude themselves after marriage, a place where some women give birth though others go to a local clinic, and a place where pots are often

made. Furthermore, within the community *Astiro* sacred forest and springs were used to renew community fertility and were located on the western feminine side of a community. Today these forest and springs continue to be used to renew human fertility through capping of the spring to ensure clean water source, reuse of soil to rejuvenate household garden plots to produce healthy crops, and use of the trees to create fires that cook food to nourish people.

Without women's life histories, I would have not understood the symbolic use of space in Borada communities nor how in practice use of that space has changed while the overall ideological structure has remained relatively consistent. By acknowledging changes revealed through an individual's life narratives, we can begin to better understand the details and patterns associated with gender-based knowledge and techniques and use of space. As part of an ethical and responsible ethnoarchaeology of engagement (Kearney, 2010), I propose that life histories become essentially integrated into ethnoarchaeological studies, as a means to ensure that we avoid representing indigenous peoples as without history and instead prioritize indigenous peoples dynamic worldviews, identities, and histories.

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NOTES

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- (2) I have worked with Yohannes Ethiopia Tocha since 2006. He speaks Gamocally the local language and English fluently and helped provide translations of my English into Gamocally during interviews and transcribed taped interviews. In 2011, he began attending university in Arba Minch Ethiopia majoring in anthropology.

- (3) I obtained consent from all participants prior to interviewing, voice and video recording, photographing and mapping.

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